has this far supported the recent decision taken by World Bank to continue participation in the Sardar Sarovar Project.

(b) and (c) Do not arise.

Improving Relations with Nepal

607. DR. NARREDDY THULASI-REDDY :

SHRI V. NARAYANASAMY :

Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state :

(a) whether it is a fact that the Prime Minister's visit to Nepal helped both countries to improve the relations;

(b) whether it is also a fact that the Government of India are helping Nepal Government in a big way for industrialisation; and

(c) whether any agreement has been signed between India and Nepal on trade and commerce ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI EDUARDO FALEIRO) : (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The liberalised guidelines of the Government of India for investment in joint ventures abroad by Indian entrepreneurs would greatly simplify the procedures for setting up such ventures in Nepal. Together with the certificate of origin system, this will promote Nepalese exports to India as also the industrialisation of Nepal and local employment opportunities.

(c) While no agreement was signed, a Joint Communique listing various areas of cooperation including trade and commerce was signed between India and Nepal.

Disposal of Passport applications

608. SHRI VIRENDRA KATARIA :
SHRI DEBABRATA BISWAS :

Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state :

(a) whether Government are aware that lakhs of passport applications are lying pending in various regional passport offices in the country;

(b) if so, what are the reasons therefor; and

(c) if so, what steps Government propose to take for their quick disposal ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI EDUARDO FALEIRO) : (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The large pendency is primarily due to a spurt in the number of applications received by the Passport Offices, which has rendered the existng facilities inadequate.

(c) The Government has taken urgent steps to tackle the problem by, inter alia, increasing the supply of passport booklets; increasing the staff strength of various passport offices; expanding the use of computers and streamlining procedures for the issue of passports.

Trade Agreements with France

609. SHRI V. NARAYANASAMY : Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state :

(a) whether it is a fact that our Prime Minister's recent visit to France has enabled India to attract investments from France;

(b) whether it is also a fact that the economic reforms brought by the Government of India enabled French investors to invest in India; and

(c) whether any trade agreements have been signed between Government of India and France during Prime Minister's visit to France ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI EDUARDO FALEIRO) : (a) PM's visit has generated renewed interest in India and French business circles have generally shown indications of greater willingness to cosider investments in India.

(b) Yes, Sir.

(c) No, Sir. However, an Agreement on Avoidance of Double Taxation was concluded which will facilitate trade and investment.